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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 008034

SIPDIS

NSC STAFF FOR POUNDS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPT: AYMAN NOUR AT THE END OF HIS ROPE

Classified by DCM Stuart E. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

11. (C) Opposition leader Ayman Nour recently gave poloff a dramatic account of his current political travails, claiming the GOE has responded "with ferocious vengeance" to his strong showing in the September 7 presidential election. While this is Nour's version of events, and needs to be put in the context of political maneuvering in advance of the parliamentary elections, Nour is the leading opposition figure in Egypt and his charges are likely to be reported widely in the western media. Nour described to poloff a "vicious campaign" to destroy him, his reputation, and his party. According to Nour, the latest of the "dirty tricks" includes a recording of unknown origin now in circulation entitled "Ayman Nour's scandal" -- which contains separate audio recordings purportedly of both Nour and his wife Gameela, each engaged in lurid conversations with their respective lovers.

12. (C) Claiming the GOE was bent on kicking him out of parliament, Nour asserted that State Security was directly and bluntly intimidating voters in his home district. Nour also accused the GOE of engineering the emergence of a parallel Ghad Party -- led by Nour's former friend and confidante Musa Musa, which has now issued a parallel Ghad Party newspaper and will apparently field its own parliamentary candidates under the Ghad Party banner. Nour believed he may soon be re-arrested and jailed on a new "trumped up" bribery case. The dispirited Nour confided that all the stress had taken him near the breaking point, and openly contemplated withdrawing from politics and/or leaving Egypt. Though we cannot absolve Nour of any wrongdoing in his past, we find credible his charges is the target of a politically motivated campaign to remove him from the stage. End summary.

"Dirty Tricks" Campaign Shifting into High Gear

13. (C) Poloff met for 90 minutes on the evening of October 15 with Ghad Party President Ayman Nour, at the latter's request. We understand Nour has also been speaking with western journalists, including the New York Times, which may soon publish an article detailing his allegations of GOE persecution. In his meeting with poloff, the normally confident Nour was uncharacteristically morose. Nour said that the weeks since the September 7 presidential election had been the worst in his life. Nour surprised observers in the presidential election by receiving, according to the official results, more than 500,000 of the 7 million votes cast. (Nour claims that he actually received many more votes, perhaps as many as 22 percent of the vote.) "This result was extremely painful for the ruling powers," Nour asserted, "now they are determined to take revenge by destroying my career, destroying my reputation, and destroying my spirit."

Re-Arrest, Jailing Imminent?

14. (C) Nour told poloff that he feared That he will be re-arrested and returned to jail in a second "trumped up" case - this time apparently a bribery charge. Nour said he had received a call from the office of People's Assembly Speaker Fathy Surour advising him that the Speaker had received a request from prosecutors that his parliamentary immunity be lifted and that Surour felt he had no basis to deny the request. (Note: Nour's immunity was also lifted hours before his arrest in January. End note.) The prosecutor's request apparently relates to the case of Ayman Barakat, a former employee in Nour's law office who was accused of bribery and fraud. Prosecutors alleged Barakat paid a poor resident from his village in the Delta to "stand in" for him in jail. Nour told us that last week he was informed by the Public Prosecutor's office that he has now become a target in the investigation -- the "stand-in" is

claiming that Barakat, in setting up the arrangement, was acting on Nour's orders. (Note: We have no independent confirmation that Nour will become a defendant in this case. End note.)

15. (C) Nour insists he has never met and had never heard of the "stand-in" before the case broke and is extremely agitated by the prospect of returning to jail. "They are planning to put me in Abu Za'bal - the worst jail in Egypt," he stated, recalling his allegedly brutal handling during his first arrest in January. "I cannot go back to jail...I believe they want me in jail on Election Day (November 9)," he asserted.

Smut and Sleaze

16. (C) Nour and his wife (and principal advisor) Gameela Ismail, who sat in on the meeting with poloff, were also agitated by a CD of unknown origin entitled "The Scandals of Ayman Nour," which they said began circulating in Cairo last week. The CD, which has already been the subject of an article in the tabloid Al-Midan, contains purported audio recordings of Nour engaged in a lewd conversation with a "girlfriend" and a second recording, purportedly of Gameela, engaged in pillow talk with a "lover." Gameela said the CD was analyzed by a professional audio technician who told her it had been heavily dubbed. Ayman and Gameela charged that the CD marked a new low in the GOE's efforts to destroy them, by invoking sexual innuendo; a particularly devastating weapon against a woman in an Islamic society.

Intimidation in Bab Shariya

17. (C) Nour also claimed that State Security intimidation of voters in his parliamentary constituency of Bab Shariya, a working class neighborhood in Central Cairo, had become increasingly blunt and heavy-handed. The challenger for Nour's seat in the district, the NDP's Yahya Wahdani, has a "day job" as a senior officer in the State Security service. According to Nour, many of the local "pillars" of his constituency, neighborhood businessmen and community leaders, had been summoned to State Security and warned to withdraw their support for Nour or face unspecified consequences. He claimed that constituents who shake his hand and greet him on the street during his regular visits to the district are questioned by State Security minutes later. Additionally, Nour charged that the work stoppage of the new Ministry of Health clinic under construction in his district also constituted retaliation against him.

The Parallel Party

18. (C) Nour also complained of actions by Musa Musa, formerly his best friend and deputy leader of the Ghad Party, until they fought for control of the party in Mid-September.

19. (C) Musa and fellow expelled members of the Ghad's central committee Ragab Hilal Hameida and Mursi Al-Sheikh have now set up their own Ghad Party in parallel to Nour's. Nour told poloff he was convinced Musa's efforts to form a rival/parallel Ghad Party leadership were financed by State Security and coordinated with the wider GOE. He noted that the first "General Conference" of Musa's parallel Ghad Party, staged in early October, had received front page coverage on leading pro-government daily Al-Ahram. Nour asserted that the parallel party's conference had been populated not by dissenting Ghad Party members, but by a "rented" crowd organized by Musa's brother, a personal friend of Gamal Mubarak and a member of the NDP policies secretariat.

110. (C) Nour observed that on October 12, a parallel Ghad Party newspaper, identifying Musa as party leader, hit the newsstands, replacing Nour's Ghad Party paper. Showing poloff a copy of Musa's "dummy" Ghad paper, Nour pointed out several articles on the first three pages - one defaming Nour as an incompetent and irresponsible autocrat, one praising Mubarak's restraint and dignity in the face of taunts and insults from Nour, and even a page three article asking "why are Gamal Mubarak's political rights being denied?"

111. (C) Nour claimed that the "dummy" paper had cost the "actual" Ghad paper thousands of dollars in lost revenue and was bound to confuse the his paper's substantial readership. Moreover, Nour added, Musa's "dummy" paper was issued and distributed without any license or permit, a criminal offense, but the GOE had not prevented it. Nour's written complaint to the Public Prosecutor's office on the matter has gone unanswered. Moreover, Nour continued, there are now signs that Musa's parallel party is planning to field its own

candidates for parliament, under the "Ghad Party" banner.

Criminal Forgery Trial to Resume

12. (C) Compounding Nour's woes, his trial on criminal forgery charges is scheduled to resume on October 22. Prosecutors declined to drop the case against him, as some observers had expected, when their star witness told the court in June that he had been coerced into giving testimony against Nour by prosecutors (ref B). Nour predicted that the court would hold daily sessions beginning October 22, and consume as much time as possible during the two weeks before the November 9 election.

Who's Behind It?

13. (C) Nour was convinced that the campaign against him could ultimately be traced back to Gamal Mubarak and his supporters. He claimed that they see him as a threat to Gamal's plans to succeed his father. He also charged that the political leadership appears to have delegated to State Security the task of coordinating the campaign of harassment. Nour confided that the stress of the past few weeks had taken him to the breaking point, adding that he saw the end of his political career on the horizon.

Comment

14. (C) Although we are unable to absolve Ayman Nour of any past wrongdoing in either his political career or his private legal practice, we find credible Nour's assertion that the campaign against him switched into high gear in the lead up to parliamentary election. Young and charismatic, Nour diverges from the archetype of the Egyptian opposition leader. Virtually all of his opposition counterparts are in their seventies, out of touch with youth, and wedded to outdated and impractical political ideologies. On one hand, even under ideal circumstances, he can barely dent the anticipated electoral support for the NDP parliamentary candidates. On the other hand, it does appear that he has offended -- and gotten under the skin -- of the political establishment, which has decided to retaliate with the full arsenal of political tools at its disposal. End comment.

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